Is a Woman's Voice *'Awra*?: Gendered Muslim Voices in Twentieth-Century Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Jay Yeo: Is a Woman's Voice *'Awra*?: Gendered Muslim Voices in Twentieth-Century Egypt
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"Is a woman's voice 'awra?" is a question that abounds on online fatwa forums and expresses the contemporary concern surrounding the appropriateness of Muslim women's voices relative to their bodies. This paper presents an initial foray into the historical roots of this question by examining women's voices in twentieth-century Egypt with particular attention to the impact of audio technologies. I argue that women's voices became a site of cultural contestation during the early and mid twentieth century, which combined with the anxieties surrounding religion in the 1970s and 1980s with rise of the "New Islam" to produce this contemporary question. I draw attention to the political stakes of Muslim women's voices in twentieth-century Egypt, specifically, and point to the broader relevance of women's voices across diverse contexts. Far from conclusive, this paper offers an argument that in turn poses many more questions for further historical and ethnographic investigation.

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Introduction

"… Misogyny abounds in the pronouncements of many Islamic 'scholars' and 'imams'… The promotion of such negativity against women has led many 'scholars' and 'imams' to make the unsubstantiated ruling about female speech. They claim that women should lower their voice to whispers or even silence except when she speaks to her husband, her guardian or other females. The female act of communication has become to some a source of temptation and allurement to the male."[1]

"Yes, women are ordered to avoid fitna; therefore, if listening to a woman's voice entices men, she ought to conceal it."[2]

"Is a Woman's Voice *'Awra*?"

Typing *sawt al-mar'a*, woman's voice, into the Google search bar will yield a page full of results, all of which include in their title, "Is a woman's voice *'awra*?" The majority of these

[1] Yusuf al-Qaradawi is a contemporary Egyptian scholar who dedicates a section of his Islam 101 site to "Islam and women." On this page, "The Voice of a Woman in Islam," he offers his opinion that women's voices are not to be diminished or silenced and criticizes scholars and imams for saying otherwise and provides Qur'anic support for his position, citing Qur'an 28:23, 33:32, and 33:53 along with a couple of hadith to support his position. The fact that there is a full page devoted to women's voices as part of an "Islam 101" website suggests the prominence of the question and the subsequent felt need to substantively address it. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "The Voice of a Woman in Islam," Islam 101, http://www.islam101.com/women/qaradawi.html.

[2] Salih bin Fawzan al-Fawzan, "Is a Woman's Voice 'Awra?" Islamway.net, https://ar.islamway.net/fatwa/7640/%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9. This post is in Arabic, and the translation is my own.

sites are online fatwa forums where one can seek a legal opinion (or two or three, often depending on one's satisfaction with the first) from the comfort of one's computer or mobile device. While searching "woman's voice" in English produces a list of results that reflects a metaphorical understanding of voice as presence or participation, adding the contextual modifier "Muslim" results in a list much like the Arabic. These results are illustrative of concern of whether a woman's voice is 'awra, or of the parts that should be covered or nakedness. The answer to this question, furthermore, is not settled with various iterations of both sides of the debate reflected in the responses of the shaikhs, imams, and scholars.

These two examples, while anecdotal and not representative of the world of online fatwas, let alone the Muslim communities of which the requesters are a part, are one of the manifestations of a growing concern about Muslim women's voices taking place on a global, though not universal, scale.[3] The present-day debate surrounding women's voices is not an entirely new question, as medieval scholarship illustrates, but rather is a resurgent question arising in a new form in which women's voices are of particular concern and are understood in relation to their visual, gendered and sexualized bodies. It is a question about voice expressed in language of the visual that reflects the colonial heritage of women's bodies in cultural debates and, similar to the discourse surrounding the hijab, reflects the ongoing struggle to navigate the post-colonial terrain as a Muslim woman.

[3] See for example Rasmussen and Gade for discussions of women Qur'an reciters in Indonesia where women's voices do not appear to be understood as a catalyst for fitna as they are in other parts of the world. Juliane Hammer also draws attention to the voice and online fatwa forums and their implications for gender, space, and practice in American mosques. Anna Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Anne Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Juliane Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism : More than a Prayer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012) 144-145.

The debates surrounding women's voices therefore parallel many of the developments surrounding the hijab, though they diverge at key points because of the sensorial difference and the understanding, construction, and manipulation of both sight and sound. The introduction of audio technology during the colonial period, which mediated sound from visual body, is therefore one of the key sites in which the contestations surrounding the sonic voice and the visual body can be identified and also a site in which they were negotiated and navigated.[4] Audio technologies posed new questions regarding the voice at the same women became objects of cultural contest during the colonial period, a trend that continued through the nationalist agendas of the mid-twentieth century up to the present day. This, in turn, positioned women's voices as sites of control and debate as they were collapsed into the visual body. This formulation of the question– Is a woman's voice 'awra?– comes as a result of the importance of women and their representations during the twentieth century, the ability to separate voice from body enabled by audio technologies, and the subsequent appearance of the voice as a site of neo/colonial debate about women's bodies.

Egypt and Geographical Focus

Though the conversation of a woman's voice being 'awra is occurring on a global scale, as suggested by the various languages and country domains represented on the online fatwa forums, I will be directing my attention to the Egyptian context for practical research considerations and because of Egypt's geographical, scholarly, and economic

[4] While the "colonial period" is difficult to pin down as a result of the ongoing interaction between Egypt and Europe prior to the twentieth century as well as the continuing impact of these interactions to the present, I follow the common designation of the colonial period as occurring between 1882 at the time of British occupation up until the final withdrawal of British forces and the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952. As expressed in the paper's title, however, much of my analysis focuses on the twentieth century.

position in these debates during the twentieth century. In the following I highlight some of key reasons for starting what I aim to be an ongoing engagement with this question in Egypt. This paper will take a more narrow geographical focus to a concern that is expressed on an international scale and will therefore offer concrete contributions to the scholarship on Egypt during the twentieth century. I also endeavor in so doing to uncover some key questions and areas of inquiry that may be fruitful for future projects in other contexts.

Practically, there is more scholarship available in English and Arabic on colonial Egypt, music and sound in Egypt, politics and society in Egypt, Muslim women in Egypt, and recording technology in Egypt than in other Muslim-majority areas that were subject to colonial control. Considering the general paucity of material on this topic, I have therefore opted to begin where I have access to scholarship on related and intersecting topics.

In addition to the practical consideration of available resources, Egypt's historical position in relation to scholarly infrastructure, colonialism, audio technologies and sound, and its regional importance situate it as a good focal point for such analysis. Egypt has been and continues to be recognized as a leader in education and scholarship, especially Islamic education as well as Qur'an recitation, perhaps best represented by the historical and contemporary prestige of al-Azhar University in Cairo. It therefore also had a rich scholarly and intellectual infrastructure during the colonial period that engaged in debates surrounding these topics and produced scholarship on them.[5] This, combined with its geographical proximity to Europe and history of economic and military connections to and

[5] For example, various forms of print publications about music begin surfacing in Egypt in the late eighteenth century. Ali Jihad Racy, "Music in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: An [sic] Historical Sketch," *Elected Reports in Ethnomusicology* 4 (1985): 166.

exploitation by European powers, meant that Egypt was the subject of, contributor to, and also an authority on intellectual thought during this time.

Furthermore, by virtue of the same connections to Europe, Egypt was one of the first Muslim-majority places to acquire and put to use recording technology, which prompted early engagement and writing on voice audio technologies. Considering the scholarly clout of Egyptian thinkers, the early arrival of recording technology as well as presence of print technology that created broad circles of distribution, scholarship regarding sound, music, and audio technology also served as a referent for many other Muslim communities.[6] Relatedly, up until recently when it has faced increased international competition, Egypt has had a strong hand over the international Arabic-language recording and film industries, which resulted in the mass distribution of Egyptian music, Qur'an recitation styles, and film.[7] Though these various media and this scholarship were not simply and unproblematically adopted by all whom they touched, they shaped and influenced engagement with, for the purposes of this project, sound. Egypt therefore is well-positioned as a starting point in considering gendered voice in both the practical access to resources

[6] Michael Frishkopf, for example, discusses the way Egypt, and especially Cairo came to be regarded as the destination for music production, drawing people from all over the world and particularly from majority Arabic-speaking countries. Michael Frishkopf, "Introduction," in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo; New York: The American University Press, 2011), 12-14. It was also King Fu'ad I who, on the recommendation of Rodolphe d'Erlanger, help the Cairo Congress of Arab Music in 1932, the aims of which were revitalization, preservation, and standardization of Arab music along Western conceptions and standards of what Arab music and culture should be. See the section entitled, "Mediated (Gendered) Voices: The Introduction of the Gramophone and Proliferation of the Radio," pp. 30-42 of this paper; Anne Thomas, "Intervention and Reform of Arab Music in 1932 and Beyond," *Congrès des Musiques dans le monde de l'islam*, Assilah (2007): 8-13.

[7] Though in this work Frishkopf's focus is on Qur'an recitation, he considers the recording industry generally in his discussion. Michael Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'an Recitation and the Contestation of Islam," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 75-114.

as well as its related historical relationships and impact, though it cannot serve as a representative for other or all Muslim communities, past or present.[8]

In my analysis of women's voices in colonial Egypt, I will first address the political and social importance of sound and voice and discuss the relevance and significance of them in Islamic traditions. I will follow this by tracing discourses surrounding women's bodies during the colonial period and their interplay with those of voice. Next, I will examine the role of audio technologies and the subsequent mediation of voice and body before moving into a discussion of the impact of the developments of these discourses for the contemporary question of whether a woman's voice is part of her 'awra. By following this trajectory, I will demonstrate that due to the contestations surrounding women, women's bodies, and sound that ensued in response to colonialism in Egypt, women's voices became a renewed site of debate and control that resulted in the conjoining of voice and the visual body expressed in the contemporary question, "Is a woman's voice 'awra?" Including the voice in thinking about Muslim women's bodies and discourses surrounding them through an examination of the recent concern about a woman's voice being 'awra therefore brings to the forefront another significant and often overlooked aspect of gender and Islam

[8] This is both conceptually clear in consideration of the complex practices of exchange, distribution, and reception as well as made manifestly apparent in the very different approach to gender and gendered voice in Indonesia, for example (see note 3 above). It should also be noted that the focus of this paper during the first part of the twentieth century is, even more specifically, centered on Cairo, as it was the primary locus of these various intersecting historical strands. With the growing interconnectedness of Egypt under colonialism as well as through the nationalist outlook during the mid-twentieth century, many of major cities participated in the same cultural trends, though rural areas have, and continue to be, less integrated into urban discourses and movements.

Politics of (Muslim) Sound and Voice

The Political Stakes of Sound and Voice

While the hijab as a visible, gendered bodily practice has drawn extensive attention to the social and political significance of sight in relation to colonialism, questions regarding sound and voice in Muslim-majority contexts have only more recently emerged as an area deserving of consideration. The growing recognition of the value of including sound in social and political analyses, though it does not take up the specific question of a woman's voice being 'awra, lays the groundwork for considering the ways Muslim women's voices came to be a site of social and political debate at a time in Egypt's history when fundamental cultural and religious practices were being questioned, the effects of which continue to be seen today.[9]

Perhaps the most canonical work that addresses sound in Egypt is Charles Hirschkind's *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, in which he demonstrates the way sound and sound practices, in his case cassette sermons, actively impact political realities.[10] He emphasizes hearing, drawing on the traditions of Islamic scholarship that have placed the moral responsibility on the listener rather than voicer, and draws attention to the role of sound in shaping affect and in the cultivation of a self that in

[9] Important to note here is that "political" is not acting as a stand-in for democracy or a neo-liberal agenda of "giving voice" to "oppressed" and "repressed" women. Rather, in the case of women's voice in colonial Egypt, it is aimed at attending to constructions of women's voices as they are variously created, debated, and navigated during the twentieth century.

[10] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

tune with the ideal self.[11] Sound, Hirschkind argues, is an "acoustic architecture of a distinct moral vision" that constructs those practices compatible with reason and progress as desirable while excluding those that are disfavored.[12] Working from Wilberg's conception of communication, Hirschkind illustrates the performativity of (sonic) communication and its foundation in affect that conditions the possibilities of voicing, hearing, and listening.[13] Sound, far from being the inconsequential background noise of society, actively shapes the social and political, even when it is not being consciously registered as doing so. Continuing Hirschkind's attention to the affective impact of sound, Laudan Nooshin identifies key ways sound as type of moving, and actively constructive acoustic architecture operates on multiple levels. It is simultaneously a space for promoting, resisting, and subverting ideology and authority; a location of symbolic power; and the site of social control and/or agency.[14]

Writing amidst some of the same cultural shifts that create the issues under consideration by Hirschkind, Foucault's concept of ethical work helpfully elucidates the importance of sonic practices in the creation of the subject. Sonic practices can be seen as socially communicative and constructive ethical work, particularly following the idealized bifurcation of religious-secular and the introduction of individualized music practices

[11] Ibid. In using "affect," I follow Massumi's helpful distinction between emotion as something that is consciously experienced by a subject and affect that is pre-subjective. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

[12] Hirschkind, 16.

[13] Hirschkind 35, citing Peter Wilberg, "Charging the Question: Listening, Questions, and the Counseling Dialogue," (no longer available online).

[14] Laudan Nooshin, "Prelude: Power and the Play of Music," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 3.

afforded by technology, in which one engages in particular practices in order to cultivate the correct affective orientation that will allow one to realize the ethical ideal in a social setting.[15] By voicing, one conditions the possibilities of subject formation and, drawing on Nooshin and Hirschkind's emphasis on the sociality of sonic practices, the possibilities for others. This cultivation, however, does not follow polar or unidirectional schema in which the conception of an ideal subject is created "out there" and then internalized as individuals attempt to model themselves after that ideal. Rather, the practices themselves constitute the possibilities of subject formation. Saba Mahmood, for example, though dealing less with sound, demonstrates the ways bodily and representational practices are not only part of an internal piety but also are politically active.[16] In the case of sound and the cassette sermons under discussion by Hirschkind, playing the cassette sermons, whether at home after a long day at work, in a cab, or in a public venue, actively constructs the public arena as individuals' playback decisions are not only an individual pursuit but also socially communicative.[17] In the realm of music, as Lohman illustrates in her analysis of Umm Kulthum, sound was a space where listeners were personally empowered during a time of political and economic upheaval in Egypt and also created a new public and national

[15] Michel Foucault, *Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

[16] Though not dealing with sound, Saba Mahmood also writes about the political significance of bodily practices, including the visual practices of the body such as wearing a hijab, showing the way that these practices constitute a politically impactful habitus. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[17] Hirschkind.

consciousness, especially following the 1967 defeat.[18] Sound practices, rather than simply individual practices of internalization and imitation, are, to borrow Nooshin's language, socially, politically, and ideologically agentive.

The voice is one aspect of this in-flux acoustic architecture and a means through which it is constructed. It is performative: It is a process that actively constructs, dismantles, and shifts possibilities of subject formation, publics, and power relationships. Moreover, it is tightly tied to affect with the ability to be socially and politically communicative and impactful even when it is not consciously thought to do so. The voice, as will be discussed in the following, is also perpetually unsettled between voicing and listening as it is both produced and listened to, whether live or mediated. This unsettledness allows the voice as well as the roles of the voicer and the listener to be variously constructed for different purposes, whether to promote or resist, control or subvert. In the case of twentieth-century Egypt, the voice shifts between emphases on the voicer and listener, the religious and the secular, and control and agency. Women, spotlighted during this time as indicators and representations of culture, are therefore both subjects of control and debate as well as agents with uniquely positioned symbolic power.[19] Women's voices, then, become a prime site of where the cultural struggles of colonialism and those following the colonial period are played out, exercised, enforced, and resisted.

Sound, Voice, and Listening in Muslim Traditions

[18] Laura Lohman, "'The Artist of the People in the Battle:' Umm Kulthum's Concerts for Egypt in Political Context," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

[19] As will be discussed further later, this unsettledness and propensity for movement through its affective impact, position the voice as a key sight of control and agency, as it is constantly imagined to threaten to undercut rational thought by directly shaping pre-subjective affect. Hirschkind, 134.

The question of women's voice is particularly interesting in a Muslim-majority context where sound and sound practices are central to religious practice and an area of heightened attention and concern. One of the most lauded characteristics of the Qur'an, coming out of the pre-Islamic Arabian context in which recited poetry was widely appreciated and occupied a privileged cultural position, is its sonic characteristics, though it distances itself from human-made poetry and is treated as superior to poetry and music.[20] The beauty of the recited Qur'an is cited, for example, in numerous hadith reports and historical narratives as the cause for conversion, opponents' surrender in battle, and military success.[21] This tradition of attentiveness to sound is continued into the present day, as evidenced by William Graham, Navid Kermani, and Michael Sells', among others, emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of the recited Qur'an and their powerful impact on affect, emotion, and meaning-making.[22] Ethnographers and ethnomusicologists have similarly noted the importance of the recited Qur'an in the cultivation of particular affective sensibilities, the development and expression of emotion in individuals and communities or groups, and the shaping of local and transnational political possibilities, as both goal and

[20] Qur'an 36:69. For a discussion of Qur'an recitation in Egypt and the ways Qur'an reciters navigate the musical and poetic in their recitation of the Qur'an, see Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

[21] Perhaps one of the most well-known conversion stories is that of 'Umar, who would later become the second caliph. While searching for his drinking companions, 'Umar passed by the Ka'ba where he heard Muhammad reciting the Qur'an in his prayers. 'Umar was overcome with emotion at the sound of the Qur'an: "'… my heart was softened and I wept, and Islam entered into me.'" As Kermani points out, this story is only one of many that have been told and retold to evidence the power of the recited Qur'an. Navid Kermani, "The Aesthetic Reception of the Qur'an as Reflected in Early Muslim History," in *Literary Structure of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Isssa J. Boullataa (Richmond, Surry: Curzon, 2000), 261.

[22] See William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); William Graham and Navid Kermani, "Recitation and Aesthetic Reception," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Navid Kermani, *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press, 2015); Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2006).

result of reciting the Qur'an.[23] The Qur'an, then, powerfully operates in the realm of sound where affect, emotion, meaning, and politics are navigated through its recitation.

The continued emphasis on the orality and aurality of the Qur'an has consequently positioned sound as one of the key areas of religious practice. It has thus given rise to substantial literature and debate around proper modes of recitation with particular attention to preserving the Qur'an's *i'jaz*, or inimitability. Through the distancing of the Qur'an from poetry and its positioning as superior to poetry because of its i'jaz, it simultaneously draws attention to the areas of overlap between the Qur'an and human-made poetry. Through its distancing, it therefore sets up an unsteady dialectic, the border between the two sides of which is constantly in need of patrolling and regulation. A significant amount of ink has been spilled, for example, on where the limit between the beautification of one's voice in Qur'an recitation and the imposition of human-made innovations onto the Qur'an lies. Similarly, there have been ongoing debates surrounding the permissibility of poetry (whether explicitly religious or not), instrumental music, and vocal music and by whom, in which contexts, and under what constraints.[24] As a result of the centrality of the recited Qur'an and the ongoing debates arising out of the tense connection drawn between it and human-made sounds, sound has been and continues to be a site of heightened attention and interest for navigating religious and cultural practices.

These debates have been particularly noticeable in the Egyptian context because of its scholarly infrastructure and prestige, including Egyptian Qur'an recitation styles. It has

[23] See Frishkopf, "Introduction;" Frishkopf, "Mediated;" Nelson; Gade; Rasmussen; Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[24] See Nelson, for example, who discusses the ongoing negotiation required to achieve an ideal recitation of the Qur'an.

consequently been the site of religious and ideological debates and power struggles, particularly with Saudi Arabia, whose Qur'an recitation styles have been growing in popularity and competing with the Egyptian styles. In what Michael Frishkopf has termed the ideologization of Qur'an recitation, sound continues to be a site of ongoing religious debate.[25] This focus on sound, coming out of the tense relationship between the Qur'an and poetry and music, was heightened with the introduction of audio technologies and becomes of particular concern for women as they become the focal point in colonial contestations. For example, while recording and broadcasting the Qur'an was seen to open up channels for wider woman listener participation and therefore laudable, women were also actively excluded from using their own voices for public and publically mediated Qur'an recitation. Up until the 1930s, when women's voices in Qur'an recitation were declared 'awra by Egyptian radio officials, women had in fact, through at least the nineteenth century, been able to be professional Qur'an reciters.[26] As these contemporary examples and scholarship illustrate, sound is not only historically or ideally important in Muslim traditions but continues to be highly relevant to contemporary practices and debates.

Important to note in addition to the general significance of sound are the relative roles of listening and voicing in Muslim traditions. As Hirschkind and others explain, there is substantial emphasis placed on listening and the ear and listening as an agentive act in Muslim thought and literature.[27] The responsibility lies with the listener to cultivate the

[25] See Frishkopf, "Mediated" regarding the ideologization of Qur'an recitation styles beginning in the 1970s and 80s. This will be addressed more fully in the sections to follow. See also Nelson on the prominence of debates surrounding recitation, poetry, and sound in Egypt.

[26] See Frishkopf, "Mediated," 83, n. 25.

[27] See Hirschkind, especially his introduction; Gade; and Nelson for discussions of listening.

correct moral disposition with which to approach Qur'an recitation, poetry, or music. As illustrated by the same literature and evidenced in contemporary ethnographic literature, though there is an emphasis on hearing as part of an interactional practice, *tarab*, in which the voicer and the listener are mutually dependent on one another.[28] The voicer depends on the listeners to come "ready to listen," who also rely on the voicer to activate and/or heighten their experience, who then in turn relies on the listeners to voice responses as encouragement or to highlight particularly moving passages, in an ongoing feedback loop. The voice operates between both the listening and the voicing, as it is both actively received and a/effective as well as produced and creatively responsive. The voice is subsequently open to analysis on both the listening and voicing sides of this loop while also drawing attention to the difficulty in separating them. The question expressed in "Is a woman's voice 'awra?" however, is directly concerned with whether voicing is permissible for women and in which circumstances. As will be discussed in the sections to follow, despite the tradition of cultivating the ear and as the emphatic focus on voicing in this question exemplifies, the voicing aspect of the voice gains prominence during the twentieth century in Egypt with the introduction of audio technologies, particularly the cassette and especially in regard to women's voices.

The voice has been and continues to be a human-relational aspect of sound in Muslim traditions, in which sound occupies a position of importance in navigating the religious and cultural. This ongoing attention to and concern about sound in Egypt combines with the more general recognition of the significance of sound in questions of

[28] Though as previously discussed, Qur'an recitation, poetry, and music are treated separately from one another, they utilize the same interactive and affective aesthetic practices. For an illustration of their shared stylistic and performative features, see Virginia Danielson, "The 'Qur'an' and the 'Qasida:' Aspects of the Popularity of the Repertory Sung by Umm Kulthum," *Asian Music* 19, no. 1 (1987): 26-45.

culture and politics to make it a key area of analysis and window into the debates surrounding gender during the twentieth century and why it is at this time that the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra surfaces.

Voice in the Qur'an and Hadith

The concern expressed in the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra is one regarding the permissibility of voicing, in which circumstances, and under which constraints (if any). Because this question operates in a Muslim framework and is directed toward ensuring proper moral behavior and practice, it is useful to track the Qur'an and hadith passages that are cited in scholars' responses and on which their responses rely. Doing so reveals the use of what appear to be relatively recent interpretations of Qur'anic verses, likely surfacing over the last century and a half.[29] While the Qur'an has been and will continue to be multiply interpreted, what is interesting about these more recent interpretations is the questions they raise as to why these interpretations and why now.

One of the most oft cited verses is verse nineteen of Surat Luqman (31:19), which reads, according to the Sahih International translation, "And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; indeed the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of the donkeys." It may, however, be cited only in part with the last half of the verse, "indeed…," being

[29] Because this project is not focused on tracking Qur'an interpretation, an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon lies outside the scope of this paper, though it proposes itself as an interesting and useful direction for further research. The approximate timeframe given for the appearance of these interpretations is suggested based on the absence of the interpretations under consideration in the tafsir of the Jalalain, completed in 1505 in Egypt, and the fact that women were able to be professional Qur'an reciters in addition to men, though with less frequency and surrounded by more controversy, in Egypt since the 1800s up until the 1930s and 1940s (see note 27 above). Danielson, "The 'Qur'an' and the 'Qasida,'" 28.

excluded.[30] The remainder of the verse, "And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice," is then applied exclusively to women as an injunction not to speak in an alluring or enticing way to men.[31] Interestingly, it is a soft voice that is considered to be particularly problematic and enticing in the same opinions that interpret the verse in this way, so what results is an obligation to at once lower one's voice while also not making one's voice soft. This mixed message is compounded by the word translated as "lower." The verb comes from the root gh-ḍ-ḍ, which is used to mean to become fresh or succulent, especially when applied to women, in addition to meaning to lower one's gaze.[32] In light of the contrast with the donkey, "lower" could also be interpreted as making one's voice agreeable, rather than abrasive like a donkey's.

What is perhaps more significant for the interpretation of this verse is the larger context of the sura and this particular passage within the sura. The sura begins addressing the "doers of good" without any gender distinction, and poses the verses to follow as guidance for them.[33] After several verses encouraging right action and warning against wrong, the sura moves into the topic of its namesake, Luqman. The following section, of

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[30] See Islam Web, "Women's Voices in Qur'an," http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&lang=E&Id=84462; Islam Web. "Woman's Voice." *The Fatwa Center*. http://fatwa.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=157777. While not a fatwa forum, a women's forum that cites the same verse, https://www.gwf-online.org/pens/11197/%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%91%D9%8E%D8%B2%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%AB%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%9F-2/.

[31] This results from the interpretation of Qur'an 33:32, discussed below.

[32] "gh- ḍ." Arabic Almanac. http://ejtaal.net/aa/#hw4=804,ll=2356,ls=5,la=3262,sg=774,ha=538,br=693,pr=112,aan=452,mgf=649,vi=271,kz=1875,mr=471,mn=1008,uqw=1172,umr=786,ums=664,umj=582,ulq=1286,uqa=314,uqq=265,bdw=h642,amr=h467,asb=h702,auh=h1153,dhq=h405,mht=h665,msb=h177,tla=h79,amj=h574,ens=h1,mis=h1586.

[33] Qur'an 31:3.

which verse nineteen is a part, is Luqman addressing his sons, not women, and explaining how to do rightly. The voice of the donkey is contrasted with having an appropriate voice, which in turn stands in opposition to the boastfulness warned against in the previous verse. When viewed in its entirety in within the larger passage and sura, verse nineteen can also be interpreted with substantial textual, structural, and linguistic support as advising the "doers of good" against being boastful and raising their voices.

A similar interpretative approach is used for Surat al-Ahzab, verse thirty-two (33:32), in which the wives of Muhammad are addressed and instructed "not to be soft in speech," so as not to tempt men with impure intentions or desires. This verse has subsequently been interpreted as applying to all women and to mean that women either should not speak with a soft voice, thought to be alluring, or not speak with non-mahram men.[34] It is this interpretation of this verse in conjunction with the interpretation of verse nineteen in Surat Luqman discussed above that results in the ambiguous duty to lower one's voice while not being soft in speech.[35] In contrast, Surat al-Ahzab, verse fifty-three (33:53), in which Muhammad's guests are instructed to ask his wives from behind a curtain, is used to support the permissibility but regulation of women's voices in relation to their bodies. In several online fatwa forums with such an interpretive outlook, asking is understood to imply answering and therefore the permissibility of women using their

[34] See, for example, al-Fawzan, Muhammad ibn Adam, "The Female Voice and Singing," IslamQA, http://islamqa.org/hanafi/daruliftaa/7914; Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, supervisor, "Is a Woman's Voice 'Awra?" Islam Question and Answer, https://islamqa.info/en/26304; al-Munajjid, Muhammad Saalih, supervisor. "Women's Voices in the Field of Animation." Islam Question and Answer. https://islamqa.info/en/140315. Muhammad Salih al-'Uthaymin, "Is a Woman's Voice 'Awra?" Islam Way, https://ar.islamway.net/fatwa/16477/%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9;

[35] Qur'an 49:1-49:3 is approached similarly to Qur'an 31:19. Qur'an 49:1-3 is addressed to believers and exhorts them not to "raise [their] voice[s] above the voice of the Prophet or be loud to him in speech like the loudness of some of you to others." Not only is the verse not exclusively addressing women, the occasion of the revelation is thought to be when Thabit bin Qays, a man, raised his voice over the voice of Muhammad.

voices to communicate with men (in this case, non-mahram men), while the curtain is used to support various regulations on the circumstances of speech, including the visual distancing of the body.[36]

While these verses are used to support particular details of gendered voice practices, what is significant amidst the exegetical arguments is the novelty of the interpretations and, in particular, their application to women exclusively, even when the text does not single out women generally and seems to resist this type of interpretation. The question, therefore, is not which interpretation is "correct," but rather why it is that these interpretations, which appear to be unprecedented in this context, surface at this time.

This is not to say, however, that prior to the appearance of these interpretation of verses, the permissibility women's voices in certain contexts was not drawn into question. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated through the citations of hadith and scholarly tafsirs, many of which were written during the medieval era, by the same online fatwa forums. Such notable exegetes as al-Qurtubi, Abu Bakr al-Jassas, and Ibn Abidin are regularly cited with their commentary on the permissibility of women saying the adhan, the impropriety of learning from a man Qur'an reciter, singing, and other related situations.[37] What is unique in the contemporary question of whether a woman's voice is

[36] The regulations on women's voices signified by the curtain often relate to appropriate appearance and audience. For example an opinion might stipulate that a woman must be wearing a hijab when speaking to non-mahram men, while others might say that they must be separated by a curtain or other more substantial barrier, regardless of dress. See Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, supervisor, "Man Teaching Women Qur'aan Memorization from Behind a Screen." Islam Question and Answer. https://islamqa.info/en/83032; Islam Web "Listening to Women Give Islamic Lectures on YouTube." http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=246091.

[37] It should be noted, however, that the reliability of some of the quotations from historical scholars is questionable. Whether because of viewing different versions with divergent pagination or some other reason,

'awra is the collapse of a woman's voice into her visual body and the surfacing of this concern following a period when, despite the opinions recorded in historical tafsirs, women had been able to use their voices in a broader array of circumstances, including Qur'an recitation. While debates surrounding the appropriateness of women's voices in various contexts are not in themselves new, the form they have taken and the renewed interest in engaging in them are.[38]

I was not able to locate the passages quoted from Ibn Abidin's *Radd al-Muhtar* or Ibn Humam's *Fatih al-Qadir* by Muhammad ibn Adam in his response to a question regarding the permissibility of women singing. Muhammad Ibn Adam, "The Female Voice and Singing," IslamQA, http://islamqa.org/hanafi/daruliftaa/7914.

[38] Interestingly, another new aspect of the debates surrounding women's voices is the interpretation of the Qur'an. In many of the tafsirs cited by contemporary scholars, online or in print, favor the citation of hadith and previous tafsirs to elucidate their position. Now, however, the stress seems to be placed on Qur'anic precedent for their opinions, as evidenced by the interpretations mentioned above. Though only an unproven intuition at this point, I suspect that this, what seems to be a prioritization of interpreting the Qur'an rather than relying on hadith, is part of the same movement towards text and Qur'an exegesis witnessed in the modern era.

Women's Bodies and the Visual in Colonial Egypt: The Hijab Debates

While little has been written on women's voices during the colonial period, there is a substantial body of literature on the hijab. The debates surrounding the hijab demonstrate the ways that women and women's bodies came to represent culture and cultural attainment and were controlled and used by colonial powers and those resisting them. Tracing the contours of these debates will therefore illuminate the shifting conceptualizations of women and their bodies at play during the colonial period while also demonstrating the prioritization of sight over sound in both the debates as well as the literature about them.

A Woman's Body: The Site of Culture

Paralleling the resurgent character of the concern about a woman's voice, the debates surrounding the hijab that came to the forefront during the colonial period were not entirely novel or a question without precedent. As Leila Ahmed and others have shown, the question of whether women should wear a hijab, which women, in which circumstances, and which type of hijab have been the subjects of discussions for centuries and were particularly prevalent during the Abbasid era.[39] They resurface during the colonial period, however, as women were positioned as indicators of culture in colonial struggles over cultural practices and superiority. European modernists pointed to the hijab as an indication of the cultural backwardness of Islam, whereas Egyptians who supported

[39] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

various versions of Islamic modernism argued that the hijab was evidence of the respect for women in Islam and their elevated status.[40] Women and their bodies were therefore the subject of debate in these cultural contestations. The hijab became a battleground for these cultural conflicts as well as an indication of ideological success or failure. Wearing or not wearing a hijab was read in terms of the struggle between Europe and Islam, and to make a decision, regardless of which decision it was, was a political statement.

At the same time, however, the Oriental Woman of the haram was also hypersexualized and the object of European desire. The woman's body was thus positioned as both the object of desire and also, with the hijab, the obstacle to the attainment of that desire, mirroring the larger colonial dynamic in which the lands under Muslim control were both what was desired and also, because of Islam, the obstacle to it.[41] To wear or not to wear the hijab was then a political statement understood in terms of sexualized women's bodies: to choose not to wear a hijab was read by colonial powers and their allies as freedom from "oppressive religion" by allowing visual access to a sexualized body, while to choose to wear the hijab was read as the misuse of the freedom of choice by opting for repressive (and inappropriately public) religion that disallowed women's sexuality. To choose to wear the hijab or not, not only demonstrated one's assumed adoption or rejection of a European view of the hijab but was also evidence for the redemptive

[40] This view is reflected in the opening quotation by al-Qaradawi, who cites the respect that women receive in Islam, which is realized by wearing the hijab, as explained elsewhere on his website in an article authored by Sehmina Chopra. Shemina Chopra, "Liberation by the Veil," Islam 101, http://www.islam101.com/women/hijbene.html.

[41] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 183.

possibilities for Islam and Egypt or the inherent backwardness of Islamic civilization, which in turn was tied to women's sexuality.[42]

Though women became objects of discourse, they also had significant symbolic power and thereby social agency. As both Badran and Baron demonstrate, women were actively engaging with these discourses and using their symbolic power to both support and challenge, variously critiquing the colonizer, traditional gender roles, and/or class distinctions.[43] By doing so, women were creative agents of society through their use of the hijab, as one means among many.[44] Though the language had been determined by the emphasis on women and their sexuality, especially their appearance, women's engagement with and use of this language was full of creative possibilities. It was a site of both social control and agency through its symbolic power, which women could deploy as a challenge to colonial impositions, recognition of their sexuality within Islam as well as outside of it, refusal to be defined by sexuality, participation in the economy, demonstration of the

[42] The role of women and women's sexuality in colonial debates has been documented and discussed many times over, from the early and pivotal *Orientalism* by Edward Said to Ahmed's *Women and Gender* to more contemporary work such as Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*. See Ahmed; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: University Press, 2005); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[43] Margo Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), generally and especially chapter two,"Claiming Public Space," 47-60; Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

[44] While I am focusing here on the hijab because of its operation in visual realm as well as the availability of literature on it in contrast to that on voice, I do not suggest that it is the only or primary way women were social and political agents, for, as Baron shows, women were socially and politically active in many ways. Though I am conscious of the dangers of reifying the focus on the hijab as a cultural, religious, and political symbol and women's sexualized, visual bodies by discussing the hijab here, it is my aim to take into consideration significance of the hijab in shaping the lives of women during the period under consideration in order to begin to map new possibilities of thinking about gender in relation to sound.

ability to be Muslim in the modern world, critique of predominant gender roles and expectations, or the many other possibilities.[45]

With the adoption of European economic policies and cultural practices in the early- to mid-twentieth century in Egypt, there was a move away from the hijab as the government strove to increase participation of women in mixed gender public spaces, particularly in the economy and education. With Egypt's defeat in 1967, mounting economic unrest, and competitive pressure from increasingly wealthy and successful Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, women began to wear the hijab in increasing numbers during the 1970s, a trend that has continued to the present day.[46] This movement toward the hijab continued to be understood by the colonial logic discussed above, as women opted for new forms of Islamic modernism after the failure of European economic and cultural practices. Even with the more recent recognition in Euro-American scholarship of the adoption of the hijab as a form of multiple critique– critiquing the local social conditions while also critiquing the ongoing neocolonial demand that a woman expose her body in order to be "free"– that women's clothing and their decisions about their bodies should be considered the central site and marker of debate is the result of a playing field set through the colonial period.[47]

Women and Religion/Secularism

[45] See, for example, Ahmed, 125-248; Mahmood; and Badran, *Feminists*.

[46] See the section, "Cassettes, the "New Islam," and Women's Voices" in this paper. See also Ahmed; Badran, *Feminists*; Frishkopf, "Mediated."

[47] Ahmed; Mahmood; on multiple critique, see miriam cooke, "Multiple Critique," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002).

While the discussion above is only a sketch of a much broader area of inquiry, the conversations surrounding the hijab illustrate the way women came to be the objects and actors of much attention during the colonial period, construed as the indicators and representatives of cultural and ideological debates. Because of this spotlighting of women, various other conceptual, political and economic shifts come to be mapped onto women and their bodies, including the division between the religious and secular with the prime operator in these divisions being the individual agent.

One of the conceptual frameworks that comes to the forefront during this period is the division between and creation of the religious and the secular.[48] In using these terms, it is important to note that the ideals of "religion" and "secularism" are themselves contemporarily contested and debated, as, for example, secular is exposed as having religious underpinnings, at the very least, and as sharing a nearly indiscernible border with "religion." The "religious" and the "secular" thus represent ideals that are never fully actualized, whether in Europe or abroad. As ideals, however, they are politically active and were ideals operative at the time, though they were built upon Christian-European conceptions of religion. They therefore also motivate and build discourses, even if they are themselves highly problematic categories, and attending to them and the way they operated in twentieth-century Egypt draws attention to how and why women, their voices, and their bodies came to be debated in such a way so as to give rise to the question driving

[48] While this observation has been echoed by numerous authors and is the subject of a substantial amount of literature, a helpful overview of the historical development of religion and secularism and their division from one another can be found by Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). I use "creation" here to allude to the development of a concept of religion in opposition to secularism that comes out of a particular Christian, European context. With this view, secularism is exposed as being a product of "religion" and is necessarily dependent upon it. As will be discussed in the following, this opposition demanded new conceptual arrangements of religion, public, private, and women's roles in them.

this investigation. In using "religion" and "religious" as distinct from "secularism" and "secular," I aim to capture the idealized polarity that animates the contestations surrounding women rather than to ascribe to them an innate, monolithic, natural, superior, or actualized character.

Within this constructed and idealized polarity, the "secular," as mentioned above is in fact tightly intertwined with the "religious." Religion, on the European modernist view, was ideally, though often not actually, to be a private affair and did not have place in the public, while secularism was the to be the rule in public, a single public that was to be shared by both men and women.[49] Thus, as seen above, such outward displays of religion as the hijab were seen to be an inappropriate incursion of the religious into the public, while bodily and sexual freedom, signaled by the absence of the hijab, were to be seen as the realization of freedom and the rejection of oppressive religion. The bifurcation of religion and secularism, oppression and freedom, was also a division between religion and sexuality with women as the central mediators. Religion, according to this mode of thought, was positioned in opposition to sexuality, and sexuality, or rather visible expressions of sexuality, was supported a demonstration of the freedoms of secularism.[50] The choice to

[49] This, as Badran illustrates, was an ideal that was strictly patrolled and often diverged from practice. While inclusion of women in the public sphere was lauded by European colonialists, they often put up barriers to their inclusion. Citing a fear of nationalist motivation behind Egyptian modernists' efforts to allow women to matriculate into university in the early twentieth century, colonial officials stalled their efforts. Badran, *Feminists*, 52-56. Fears of nationalist motivations are no longer cited with the overthrow of the monarchy when the official line was a nationalist one, but there were, as discussed here, very particular expectations of the type of participation appropriate for women.

[50] Fatima Mernissi points to this opposition between religion and sexuality, arguing that it is the product of a particularly Christian view of sexuality and was not characteristic of Muslim societies prior to colonialism when it became the dominant arrangement. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1991), 44. It is also important to note here that this construction of sexual freedom and secularism is based in a misogynistic framework in which women are reductively essentialized as sexual and objects of sexual desire and pleasure. The "liberation" of women, therefore, is the liberation of women from their veil so they can be "freely" enjoyed by men.

wear the hijab or not was consequently a decision of political impact and expression that reified or contested the religion/private-secular/public as well as the religion/(sexual) repression- secular/(sexual) freedom divides, placing women at the center of the debate. All did not adopt this schema, though propounded as it was by colonial powers. Two predominant competing discourses surfaced: secular nationalism, which adopted in whole or in part the colonial conceptual framework, and Islamic modernism, which denied the religion/(sexual) repression-secular/(sexual) freedom division and held Islam to be compatible, and often particularly so, with modernity and societal success.[51] Regardless of the discourse, however, women continued to be markers of culture and evidentiary support for one side or the other.[52] Women's visual representations of themselves through the hijab were marshaled as support for the various sides of the debates, and their bodies came to be understood in terms of them.

What emerges out of the attempts to navigate the shifting terrains of religion, secularism, sexuality, public, and private is the constant underlying emphasis of women and their bodies as contested sites in interconnected and intertwined cultural and ideological struggles. As will be discussed in the following section on mediation and the introduction of audio technologies, the centrality of women in these debates is similarly apparent in the realm of sound with the added considerations of mediating the sound from the body, the already-otherness of sound, and the dangers posed by sound in a framework ruled by the rational.

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[51] See Badran, *Feminists*, on the development of these two discourses.

[52] Ibid.

Religious Practice and Class

The conditions of colonialism that placed women in such a prominent position were not limited to the discursive or conceptual, however, and instead had significant practical implications, including class implications. As Ahmed, Badran and Baron demonstrate, religion and secular class and economics were, in fact, tightly intertwined.[53] In the centuries proceeding the colonial period, the hijab, commonly worn by non-Muslim women as well, had been used in multiple contexts as a marker of a combination of class, occupation, and marital status. During the mid twentieth century, wearing a hijab was less popular at a time when progress and upward mobility were linked to the adoption of the ideals of European modernism. It was therefore isolating and limited women's economic mobility as it was characteristic association of lower class women.[54] To reject the ideals of European modernism and wear a hijab, then, had tangible effects on women's economic possibilities. These effects were, however, directly conditioned by the ideals surrounding women's bodies and their sexualization and the ties both to the debates of the religious-secular divide highlighted above.

In the 1970s, however, when many Egyptians became disenchanted with the European model that had only resulted in Egypt's 1967 defeat and economic struggles and women increasing began to wear the hijab, it aided in social mobility. Maintaining the separation between religion and secular economics, education, and class along European modernist lines fell out of vogue, and economic and class success was linked with what was seen as more strict religious observance, signified by the visual presentation of women's

[53] Ahmed; Badran, *Feminists*, Baron.

[54] Ahmed.

bodies. To wear a hijab allowed one to engage in education, participate in the job market, and navigate public spaces while still maintaining the authority and respect of being religiously observant.[55] The move toward the adoption of the hijab beginning in the 1970s was also more explicitly played out on an international stage and in competition with Saudi Arabian Wahhabism. The field of contestation over and through women was expanded to an international scale not only with Europe, but also with competing regional powers who, in the case of Saudi Arabia, seemed to be flourishing under a modern traditionalist approach to religion. Economic success came to be associated with religious observance, signified by women, not only as individual women and families strove toward greater economic mobility, but also as the Egyptian state competed with its neighbors, particularly with the introduction of television and the consequential proliferation and broader geographical distribution of images of women.[56] The social and class mobility afforded by the hijab, whether on an individual or state level, however, once again remained a function of the foregrounding of women in cultural debates.

Religious practice was thus tied to economic opportunities, whether creating them or limiting them, as women continued to be the sites of debate. The way women bodily engaged with the shifting discourses surrounding religion and religious practice were not only conceptually important but also brought with them concrete economic and class implications.

Sight, Sound, and Gender

[55] Ahmed.

[56] See Frishkopf, "Introduction;" Frishkopf, "Mediated;" Patricia Kubala, "The Controversy over Satellite Music Television in Contemporary Egypt," in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo; New York: The American University Press, 2011).

Following the debates surrounding the hijab and briefly considering their connections to class have demonstrated the discursive shifts that occurred during the colonial period that placed women and their bodies at the center of the debate. Up to the present, much of the discourse on women during the colonial and nationalist periods as well as the present day has focused on visual representations of women's bodies.[57] Such an emphasis on sight is itself a product of European modernity that is linked to the remove thought to be allowed by the eye for rational consideration and judgment in contrast to the dangerous immersiveness of the ear that risks subverting removed, rational thought. Sound, moreover, comes to be associated with religion and the non-rational in contrast to sight and its associations with the secular and rational.[58] The "important" area of consideration, then, was the visual. Concern for and with the visual thus dominated and continues to dominate discourses of power and representation, including in Egypt and in discourses surrounding women in Egypt and Muslim women generally. [59] With the visual as the authoritative mode of analysis and discourse, the language of the visual became the language of discussion, critique, and debate.

Meanwhile, as has been discussed above and will become more apparent in the following, sound has continued to have significant social, political, and religious

[57] Even contemporary critiques of the cultural playing field set through colonialism and the continuing, though less obvious, modes of neocolonialism focus their attention on the visual body with less consideration of voice. Present day critiques of the visual will be discussed later, in the section entitled "Television, Satellite TV, and the "Fīdīyu Klīb" Era."

[58] See Hirschkind's discussion of the eye and ear in his introduction, 14-44.

[59] Ibid. This will be discussed later in connection to the Egyptian context. See note 45 regarding the dominance of the discussion of the hijab.

ramifications. This has both helped to give rise to and shape the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra. The question itself is formulated in the language of the visual, as evidenced by the use of "'awra," which generally referred to those parts of the body that one should cover from sight. The presence of the question at all, as will be demonstrated in the following section, is a result of the transformations that occurred in sound in regards to women during the colonial and nationalist periods that have primarily gone unaddressed and, much in the way feared by European modernists, operated under the radar.[60]

[60] See note 19.

Mediated (Gendered) Voices: The Introduction of the Gramophone and Proliferation of the Radio

In her survey of responses to Amina Wadud's leading the Friday prayer in 2005, Laury Silvers notes how man-led prayer has been "piped over" to rooms for woman congregants adjacent to the main prayer hall. She suggests that the same might be done with a woman's voice, in the case that a woman leads prayer and gender separation is maintained. However, neither she at the time of writing the article, nor I have found an example of this being done.[61] Though the sight of a woman's body is, as Silvers' article attests, the primary reason given for the impropriety of woman-led prayer, women's voices seem also to be a central, if often unnoticed, concern. [62]

While direct treatments of gender and voice during the colonial period in Egypt are difficult to come by, the discourse and literature surrounding sound in relation to the introduction of audio technologies illustrates the ways sound was organized and controlled with and through them. These processes result in women's voices being construed in terms of a sexuality that is simultaneously lauded and criticized. Meanwhile sound comes to be organized according to European conceptualizations of culture, taste, religion, and performance with women's voices once again at the center of these struggles

[61] Laury Silvers, "'I am One of the People:' A Survey and Analysis of Legal Arguments on Woman-Led Prayer in Islam," *Journal of Law and Religion* 26, no 1 (2010-2011): 141-171.

[62] A welcome exception to this trend is Juliane Hammer, who draws attention to the importance of voice for possibilities of leadership, space, and participation in her chapter, "Space, Leadership, Voice." Hammer, 124-146.

The Gramophone Era and the Cultivation of Taste and Practice

Audio technologies were introduced in Egypt relatively early with the foreign recording companies, most notably British Gramophone, first producing audio recordings in 1904.[63] For the first part of the twentieth century until the more accessible radio came on the scene in the 1930s and 1940s, having and listening to audio recordings was a artistic pleasure of the wealthy, as the technology was prohibitively expensive for widespread use. Following the classical colonial paradigm, the sonic "raw material" was recorded by Britons, processed and produced in Europe in the form of records, and then sold back to Egyptians.[64] Meanwhile, those with access to a gramophone were able to listen to classical European music, which was portrayed as being culturally superior and possessing a high degree refinement and perfection in contrast to Arab, and especially Islamic, music. Already during this period of limited access to audio technology, there appears a division between the modern and secular and the traditional and religious, as the pursuit and cultivation of musical artistry itself comes to be seen as representative of a flourishing, modern cultured society.[65]

As sound was bifurcated along the secular-religious boundary with European music as the model of the modern, there also arose a nostalgia for pre-mediated Egyptian music.[66] In response to the felt need to be thoroughly modern while also maintaining roots in Egyptian culture, the secular-religious European modernist model was applied and

[63] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 6-7.

[64] Ibid., 14.

[65] Thomas, 1.

[66] Ibid., 5.

integrated into Egyptian musical culture. Perhaps one of the clearest early examples of this is the Cairo Congress of Arab music, a three-week long conference held in the spring of 1932 by King Fu'ad I on the suggestions of baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger. Cairo, already a center of scholarship and music, hosted scholars and performers from throughout the Arab world and, significantly, Europe.[67] The stated goal of the conference was to attain the degree of refinement present in European music, premised on the idea that Arab music was in decline and was in need of simultaneous revitalization and preservation of its more perfect heritage.[68] In order to carry out such a monumental task, hundreds of performances were given and recorded and a committee jury system was implemented, each committee required to have a minimum of one European, to define, delimitate, and standardize Arab music (particularly in contrast to Persian and Turkish musics).[69] Though the conference did not result in such a clearly defined account of Arab music as King Fu'ad might have liked, it did produce a Arabic tuning system, recommendations on using European instruments because of their "superior expressive qualities," and a collection of recordings taken to be representative of Arabic music at the time.[70]

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[67] Scholars in Egypt were also already producing printed material about music by the end of the nineteenth century. This in addition to the scholarly and cultural clout of al-Azhar University and the close connections with Britain made Cairo the ideal location to host such an event. See Frishkopf, "Introduction," 1-5 on Egypt during the early gramophone era.

[68] Thomas, 3. While an evolutionary developmental approach was taken to music and the shortcomings of Arab music were explained in terms of the strengths of European music, Arab music itself was not necessarily understood deficient but was thought to have been corrupted by the laziness and neglect of the contemporary musicians.

[69] Ibid., 3-13. The concern with differentiating Arab from Persian and Turkish musics foreshadows the Panarabist attitude of Nasser and also indicates the awareness of Egypt operating on a global musical stage. This is perhaps particularly relevant as Egypt establishes itself as a state in its own right on a global stage with its own colonial intentions with the Sudan and, later, in the contemporary period in relation to Saudi Arabia.

[70] Ibid., 3.

The audio technology itself also transformed sonic practices. Prior to the introduction of the gramophone, music, poetry, and Qur'an recitation took extended lengths of time often spanning tens of minutes to an hour. The record, however, was limited to two to four minutes of recording per side, depending on size and speed. This required musicians amputate large sections of their performance in order to make it at the three-minute mark, or else have it broken into multiple sections. In addition to limiting time and consequently the form of music, the gramophone also disrupted the tarab aesthetic, as the responsibility and weight of performance was shifted onto the musicians.[71] There was no mechanism by which a listener could interact with the musicians or the musicians with the listener except through the exchange of money for a good; instead, musicians performed into a horn for a length less than five minutes, a process that produced a record to be consumed by listeners. Although the length limitations were alleviated by later audio technologies, the change in tarab aesthetic and significance of capital success remained.[72]

The gramophone era and the early engagements with mediated and European music also resulted in a shift in performers with new sponsorship of gentleman performers supported by both the wealthy and the government and subsequent subordination of "vulgar" and morally questionable popular performers. Prior to mediation, musicians, singers, and entertainers were organized by guilds and had a lower social status. With the introduction of audio technologies and the growing concern for cultivating musical taste

[71] For effect of recording technology on tarab aesthetic, see Frishkopf, "Introduction," 7; Ali Jihad Racy, "Record Industry and Egyptian Traditional Music: 1904-1932," Ethnomusicology 20, no. 1 (1976): 23-48; and Racy, "Music in Nineteenth-Century Egypt."

[72] See Frishkopf, "Introduction," 7, for example, commenting on the transition from gramophone to radio.

and style as representative of culture along the European model, the government and the wealthy supported the replacement of these popular performers with gentleman performers, drawn from the effendiyya. This group of musicians eventually formed the Royal Oriental Music Institute, the group responsible for holding the Cairo Congress discussed previously.[73] As a result of this shift, the musicians who were to receive the greatest support were those who would advance the idea of music as a marker of culture along the lines of European music aesthetics.

Although much of this division and organization of sound was being done with a top-down approach, and indeed music practices that ran contrary to these divisions continued to exist, the effects of these sonic division progressively took hold in Egyptian music practices.[74] Under regimes that had a direct hand in social and cultural organization, this European modernist model was actively supported in the public sphere. The gentleman musicians that gradually displaced the popular musicians were able to do so because of the wide support they had from the government and colonial powers in addition to their financial freedom. They, unlike the popular musicians, did not need to play for

[73] Thomas. It is important to note that while there is a clear movement towards a change in musician training, social class, and taste beginning in the early twentieth century, it was not an immediate and whole-sale shift. As Frishkopf notes in his introduction, authenticity was still a major concern for listeners, and such authenticity was gained through pre-mediated popularity as well as ties to Arab and Egyptian music and recitation aesthetics. It was, therefore, those performers who straddled the mediation divide that initially enjoyed widespread popularity and stardom, as was the case with Umm Kulthum, whose pre-mediation and Qur'an recitation training background allowed her to claim authenticity while the music she produced was not explicitly religious and tended to adopt some European characteristics. See Frishkopf, "Introduction," 13; Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt : Umm Kulthūm, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[74] As noted above, this was not a complete reorientation of the entirety of Egyptian culture. Just as the colonial discourse surrounding the hijab did not represent the adoption of it as different views continued and new alternatives imagined, this organization of sound was not uniformly adopted. In the case of sound, however, the state was able to directly intervene and control public sound practices. With a monopoly over the administration, public performance, recording technology, and education, then, the government made it difficult to engage in other modes of sound organization and, importantly, pass them on to the next generation.

money to support themselves and instead could perform publicly with the support of the government. It was during this time when singers and musicians were also required to attend music institutes being established by the government and the Royal Oriental Music Institute in order to receive a card that would allow them to sing publicly. The music (re)education efforts of the government extended to Egypt's public schools as well, as Mahmud al-Hifni, working under Robert Lachmann, a German ethnomusicologist, in the 1920s and the first Egyptian to receive a PhD in music, was appointed as music inspector for the Ministry of Education. A critic of the degraded state of Arab music, al-Hifni implemented complete music curriculum reform in the public schools.[75] Meanwhile, the Royal Oriental Music Institute was publishing music method, teaching, and self-study guides.[76] The government support of the European modernist model and its wide-reaching music education reform efforts encouraged the division between the religious and the secular. This division was unprecedented, as the two genres had previously been performed at the same occasions and often by the same people, who would be both singer and reciter without any apparent contradiction.[77]

While a gradual process that brought with it changes in music production, form, style, and taste, this top-down approach was effective in initiating and continuing the cleavage between the religious and the secular. With the introduction of the ratio and Nasser's heavily regulated nationalized media program in the mid-twentieth century, this

[75] Thomas, 3-4.

[76] Ibid., 2.

[77] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 5-11; Frishkopf, "Mediated," 83.

divide was only reinforced while also implicating women's voices into the negotiation and maintenance of this divide.

Radio and the Sexualization of the Sonic

The advent of radio brought the divide between religious and secular, and their two logics, to fruition. Unlike the gramophone industry that had been available only to the wealthy elite, radio was much more widely accessible, at first in public and later in private homes, and also heavily regulated.[78] Under this new sonic regime, women were pulled in two different directions, understood either in terms of secular sexual freedom or religious, non-sexual legalism. In both cases, however, their voices are understood in terms of a sexualized body that is representative of culture and bears the responsibility, as voicer, for societal morality.

In the case of the hijab, there were competing discourses and subsequent trends, but the government did not directly intervene (such as was the case with Turkey's ban on the hijab or, more recently, France's ban on face covering). With radio, on the other hand, the Egyptian government directly controlled the broadcasts, including what types of broadcasts would be permitted, who the programs would feature, and what the discourse would be surrounding performances, in addition to its ongoing public performance regulation and educational reforms. Government-regulated radio came into effect in 1932 with the founding of Egyptian Radio. The first director of Egyptian Radio was Medhat Assem, who was given the post on the recommendation of the head of the Oriental Music

[78] The earliest radio stations played in Cairo during the 1920s and were privately owned with a relatively small listenership. In 1934, a royal decree allowing for the establishment of local radio stations went into effect, and stations were established in Alexandria and later Port Said, in addition to Cairo. Frishkopf, "Introduction," 8; Nassar, 68.

Institute, mentioned above.[79] At first, from 1935 to 1937, Egyptian Radio began to host Arab musicians and reciters, especially from Syria and Lebanon. While Egyptian Radio continued to host Arab musicians and reciters and contributed to the formation of musical stars such as Umm Kulthum, it also hosted numerous European-led orchestras. The orchestral programming was explicitly promotional, and airtime for it was planned accordingly.[80]

It was also during this time that women were unambiguously implicated in the sonic religious-secular divide. While woman singer-stars rose to fame, women were not permitted to recite the Qur'an on the radio, radio officials declaring women's voice to be 'awra.[81] A clear sonic division was made between the secular and the religious and was characterized by the presence or absence of women's voices. With women's presence in the secular being associated with her visual bodily unveiling as a realization of her sexual freedom, her voice in the secular came to be understood in the same way. Sight and the eye, however, continued to be the dominant mode of thought and discourse, and so, the problematic woman's voice was understood in terms of her visual body. "'Awra," used to denote the parts of the body one should cover from sight, explicitly created this link between women's voices and their sexualized visual bodies as the word came to encompass inappropriate sexuality, whether in sight or sound.

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[79] Nassar, 68.

[80] Zein Nassar, a notable Egyptian scholar-critic, cites the use of weekly statistics to promote orchestral music along an organized plan. Though it is unclear what the statistics were, how they might have been produced, and how they were used to plan, Nassar's mention of them indicates an attempt to promote orchestral music through data collection and analysis. Zein Nassar, "A History of Music and Singing on Egyptian Radio and Television," in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo; New York: The American University Press, 2011), 69.

[81] Frishkopf, "Mediated," 83, citing Ibrahim Daoud, *Al-Qur'an fi Misr* (Cairo: Toot, 1997). This is the first explicit connection between women's voices and 'awra I have found.

This organization was facilitated by the radio's position in mediating between the two. As a medium, it broadcasted both secular and religious fare for the public and was controlled by government and radio officials who were interested in promoting the secular/sexual freedom-religious/sexually repressed divide to the public. The technology itself was controversial, as scholars began questioning the permissibility of music and the technologies that communicated them with renewed vigor.[82] The state's support and sponsorship of these technologies was therefore already an embrace of the secular and a rejection of the religious that had ironically a greater propensity for privitization. What results is a medium that, while broadcasting both secular and religious programs to a public, demands that the two realms be organized according to this divide, whereby the "proper" position of women in each is reinforced and the secular is prioritized. When singing secular music, women were sonically and sexually free, their sexiness in fact being key factor of their profitability, but when reciting the Qur'an, their voices needed to be curtailed, following the religion/sexual repression schema.[83]

The divide between the religious and secular, with each of their attending organizational logics, was not just present in mediated sound, but also shaped the tastes of listeners, the training and style of singers, and the audio industry. As Nassar notes, even in the early case of orchestral music, tastes were already being formulated and reinforced through the weekly programming and planning.[84] Secular music stars began to rise in fame, recognition, and appreciation, and singers stopped vocal training in Qur'an recitation as

[82] Kubala 196.

[83] See Frishkopf, "Mediated," 83 for the profitability of sexiness and its division from religious.

[84] Nassar, 69.

Qur'an reciters gradually ceased to participate in other vocal practices.[85] Vocal style as well as career in the audio industry was therefore separated along the religious-secular divide.

The introduction of audio technologies, and especially with the more widely accessible radio, saw the beginnings of a trend toward an increased emphasis on the voicer over the listener as bearers of culture and its representation. The voice, its training, cultivation, and gender association came to represent the secular or religious, respectively. It was also a site of control by the government in order to create and maintain the secular and religious. With the breaking of the tarab aesthetic, the listener and the voicer were divided, each operating separately with only an indirect interaction with one another through the government controlled market. While these changes did not obfuscate the need for the listener to approach broadcasts appropriately, it shifted the debates surrounding the religious and secular to the realm of voice as representation that then would influence listeners. The social context of the tarab aesthetic, which supported appropriate listening,[86] continued to be replicated, however, through the communal settings in which radio was typically listened to before the introduction of less expensive and more portable transistor radios in the 1950s.[87] As will be discussed in the following section, this changed most noticeably with the proliferation of cassette players for personal use.

[85] Frishkopf, "Mediated," 83.
[86] See Hirschkind, 48-49 for a discussion of tarab and its ties to listening.

[87] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 8.

While the gramophone era and early radio[88] laid the groundwork for sonic organization and, of particular concern in this paper, the position of women's voices in these arrangements, the social prominence of the radio and its listenership grew following Nasser's rise to the presidency and the introduction of the transistor radio. This time period was characterized far reaching reforms after the overthrow of the monarchy and a modern nationalist approach to governance. Radio and television broadcasting, in addition to state-run newspapers and cinemas, were tools in this agenda. In a 1959 presidential decree, Nasser stated that Egyptian broadcasting would spread culture among the masses and educate the public about the "best products of human civilization," all while remaining rooted in authentic Egyptian cultural heritage.[89] Nasser-approved listening committees that patrolled the religious-secular divide and controlled for taste regulated radio broadcasting.[90]

It was under Nasser that radio proliferated technologically, socially, and internationally while it continued to be organized by the religious-secular divide, including its implications for women's voices. By the end of his presidency, the state had a strong hold and monopoly over Egyptian media production, which, in turn, during the height of Panarabism and with the increasing reach of technology, also had a noticeable influence

[88] I use "early radio" here to signify the time period when radio was in existence in Egypt and the "groundwork" of types of radio programming was still being formed. A useful chronological marker is radio before Gamal Abdel Nasser became president in 1956, a time period that saw a technological shift with the advent of the less-expensive transistor as well as explicit efforts to use media as part of Nasser's nation-building campaign.

[89] Kubala, 179.

[90] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 13-14.

over regional media production.[91] By enforcing the appropriately modern nationalist vision of the secular, a progressive arena of cultural sophistication that was thoroughly modern but still connected to its Egyptian and Arab roots, the presence of women's voices in the secular both reinforced the division within Egypt while also signifying to other Arab countries as well as Europe the progressiveness of Egypt. Women's voices were therefore representative culture not only to Egypt but also on a growing international stage.

The combination of Nasser's modern nationalist approach and the introduction of more widely accessible audio technology did much to proliferate the already established religious-secular divide in sound and also placed women's voices a symbols of culture in the international, especially regional, arena. Women's voices were thus paired with their visual bodies, including the emphasis on their sexuality and its implications for the religious-secular divide. For a woman to use her voice to sing secular music, therefore, was to sonically indicate her freedom from sexual repression. By contrast, to use her voice in the explicitly religious realm of Qur'an recitation was to break the divide between the secular/sexual freedom and religious/sexually repressed. To recall Laury Silvers' observation highlighted at the beginning of this section, it is precisely because women's voices came to be associated with their visual and sexualized bodies that visually and spatially separating men and women is often not enough; instead, women's voices are, in this model, understood in terms of women's sexuality.

The added symbolic import of women's voices in relation to their bodies and the religious-secular divide, like with the hijab, positions them not only as sites of control,

[91] See ibid., 14-15.

however, but also as sites of social agency. And although the radio officials of the 1930s began to establish an early link between women's voices and their bodies, it would not be until the last decades of the twentieth century when the association between voice and body was reinforced and joined with individual, "grass-roots" concern and anxiety about women as voicers that the question of whether a woman's voice was 'awra could surface in its present formulation.

Cassettes, the "New Islam," and Women's Voices

Up until the introduction of cassettes in the 1970s, most mediated music was experienced through state-controlled synchronous media with a wealthy minority that also had access to the gramophone. The cassette, however, posed new possibilities for listening that also coincided with Sadat's *infitah*, or Open Door economic policy, and an increased interest in "tradition" and Islamic modernism. As a result, this period witnessed shifts in the approaches to the religious-secular divide as well as the ways one engaged with it. While the association between women's voices and 'awra had already been made in the 1930s, it is this period that creates the need for individual women to pose questions about the relationship between voice and 'awra, rather than state-sponsored officials declaring a women's voice to be 'awra in the realm of Qur'an recitation.

Cassettes and Infitah

The presidential turnover, from Nasser to Sadat, in 1970 not only marked a change in government, but also ushered in the time of the cassette. Introduced in the 1970s and growing rapidly in popularity throughout the 1970s and 1980s, cassettes and cassette players were relatively inexpensive and widely accessible. Following Nasser's socialist economic framework in which the state had a heavy hand in regulating the market, Sadat implemented an open door policy that allowed for a dramatic increase in the number and

operation of privately owned media companies that were not subject to state control.[92] This was a marked divergence from the top-down control implemented under Nasser. Instead, the music industry under Sadat saw a greater participation of lay Egyptian listenership in sound production, distribution, and listening practices.

Following the economic downturn during the latter years of Nasser's presidency and the defeat of 1967, there was growing dissatisfaction with the modernist approach he had championed and enforced. Egyptians had noticed the discrepancy between the modernist ideas and the promise that they would enrich their lives and culture and their reality, which had worsened both domestically and internationally. The cassette and Sadat's open door policy provided an ideal opportunity to subvert the official discourses and sonic sensibilities that had dominated media. More people were able to produce cassettes that contradicted official state-produced broadcasts or tapes, and the cassettes were easily reproducible. The intersection of an economic downturn, military failure, new possibilities for participation in the music industry, and a readily accessible and easily distributed medium resulted in the broad participation of Egyptians in a sonic culture of critique and skepticism about the state.

Following an early period of more diverse experimentation, this convergence gave rise to the *sha'bi*, or popular, music genre targeted toward youth that was explicitly at odds with the official modernist ideals. It was also a genre that was operating in conversation with an increasingly accessible global music industry.[93] While the radio had brought with it

[92] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 3. As Frishkopf notes, although the government could in theory refuse publication, the rapid production of cassettes as well as their unregulated reproduction and distribution made this rare. Frishkopf, "Introduction," 16.
[93] Kubala, 179-184.

a return of the longer songs characteristic of pre-mediated music, sha'bi music tended to feature shorter songs that incorporated popular music styles and instruments from Euro-American music.[94] They were usually stylistically and formally simple and, because of their short shelf life resulting from both their simplicity and the speed of bootleg production, needed to be produced rapidly. At the same time, there were very few market analytics by which one could make production decisions, and they needed to be reliably successful due to small profit margins.[95] This resulted in the production of cassettes based on what had sold well before, leading to a lack of diversity, reliably simple recordings, and noticeable Euro-American influence among sha'bi cassette recordings through the 1980s. These recordings, popular among the urban working class, were widely criticized for lacking attention to artistry and their "vulgarity" on both modernist and religious grounds.[96]

Meanwhile, cassettes were also used to produce various types of religious media. Particularly early on in the introduction of the cassette, it was used to record live Qur'an and Sufi recitation, which would then be reproduced and circulated.[97] It was also used, as Hirschkind has illustrated, to produce sermons that ran counter to those supported by the state as well as Qur'an recitation and religious lectures.[98] Although cassettes were used for both secular and religious media, the two genres operated largely as separate arms, as the

[94] Frishkopf, "Mediated," 98.

[95] See Frishkopf, "Introduction," 16-19.

[96] See Kubala, 179-184 and Frishkopf, "Introduction," 16-19 for brief descriptions of criticism. The reasons for and effects of the criticism will be discussed in more detail in the discussions to follow.

[97] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 15.

[98] Hirschkind. See Frishkopf, "Mediated," 99 for genres.

audio industry itself was bifurcated along the religious-secular division in the 1970s.[99] While the secular arena was being influenced by Euro-American musics, the religious media were increasingly being influenced by Saudi Arabia as it rose in political and economic significance under its Wahhabi regime.[100]

The religious-secular divide was growing more complex and tense with both the change in governmental economic policy and the introduction of the cassette as well as the attending changes in participation in mediated audio culture. These changes facilitated a new approach to the religious-secular divide in sound as well as women's role in it.

Women and the Religious-Secular and in the "New Islam"

The combination of the military failure of 1967 and the worsening economic conditions of Egypt, especially in relation to the newly booming economy of Wahhabi Saudi Arabia as a result of the oil trade, were catalysts for a turn toward what has been called in Egypt *al-islam al-gadid*, or the New Islam.[101] The New Islam was a turn toward religion beginning in the 1970s as a response to social issues and regional power struggles, coupled with the recognition that European and European-imposed models had not produced the prosperity and success that had been promised. The New Islam was a multifaceted reorientation and was the underlying current behind the tumultuous years of the 1970s and 1980s (and arguably up to the present), including the increased wearing of the hijab as discussed above.

[99] Frishkopf, "Mediated," 98-99.

[100] See Frishkopf, "Mediated."

[101] Frishkopf, "Mediated."

Rather than obfuscate or dismantle the religious-secular divide, the New Islam upheld it, though it was approached and navigated differently. Rather than prioritizing the secular and modern as had been done by the state for the preceding decades, the religious side of the binary was reinvested with importance and significance for shaping government, economy, and culture. With an eye to the economic and political success of Saudi Arabia– the products, lifestyle, and capital of which many Egyptians sent back and brought back in a wave of return in 1986– Egypt's perceived lack of attention toward religion was thought to be a reason for its waning economy and regional reputation and significance.[102] The religious, rather than the secular, was becoming the marker of culture. Both the religious and the secular, however, continued to be internally organized in much the same way in regards to women. The secular, now more often and publicly criticized, continued to be associated with the non-religious, sexually "free" and uncovered, and Euro-American influence but was disinvested as the cite of culture and of social success, including in government, economy, sound, and dress. Religion, likewise, continued to be associated with the non-sexual and Islamic tradition, though it was reinvested as the site of culture and therefore moved from its sequestration in the private to the public. This movement was not a simple switch or a smooth transition, as continues to be apparent in the ongoing political and economic contests occurring in Egypt today, but rather required the navigation of a world system defined by the nation-state and capitalist market, in which

[102] See Frishkopf, "Mediated," especially 90-100; Ahmed, 127-168. It is also important to note that Saudi Arabian Wahhabism is also responding to the same modernist pressures of which Egypt had been a part with its renewed interest in text, textual interpretation, and origins. It is helpful to keep in mind that this is part of a global shift towards the same across and within multiple religions, rather than as a situation unique to Islam or to the regional geography.

Egypt continued to operate.[103] The New Islam was therefore characterized by a prioritization of religion paired with capitalism, consumerism, privatization, and, following the multiple changes and rises and falls of the previous decades, a concern for political stability.[104]

Because of the increased attention to economic success, especially in comparison with Saudi Arabia, class and its intersections with religion and representation were also reimagined. Religion was associated with wealth and so to represent oneself as religious was also to associate with the upper class. Representing oneself as religious simultaneously was a strategy for upward mobility. As previously discussed, for example, wearing the hijab provided opportunities for greater social mobility because it allowed the wearer to claim the authority of religion, even when engaging in mixed gender spaces for education or economic gain. Religion, and specifically women's self-representations of their religiosity, took on class and economic valences and was explicitly used to navigate them. Moreover, these representations were playing out on a global stage with the proliferation and easy access to media as, to put it (over)simply, a critique of Europe and competition with Saudi Arabia.[105] Women's voices in these class dynamics, discussed in the following section, took

[103] While an analysis of the various efforts at maintaining or increasing Egypt's integration into the political and economic landscape organized by the secular modernist framework it was criticizing while forefronting religion lies outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that this is by no means a settled terrain and the religious in the religious-secular divide needed to be rethought to make this possible.

[104] See Frishkopf, "Mediated," 96-97.

[105] Competition with Saudi Arabia meant a double-move of association and disassociation. While the Saudi Arabian emphasis on and prioritization of religion was admired and inspired the wide societal shift toward the New Islam, Egyptians also sought to differentiate themselves from it in order to be able to claim superiority. Thus, religion was lauded in the media while the excessiveness of Saudi Arabia and its "petrodollars" were ridiculed. See Frishkopf, "Mediated."

on similar roles, though with different implications and in different forms through the use of audio technology.

Women continued to be central in these cultural shifts as both social agents and indicators of culture. With the secular and the religious each pre-fashioned through the colonial encounter, women positioned themselves in these changes through their use of self-presentation, as was seen in the discussion of the hijab, while also continuing to be used to indicate the Islamic-ness of Egypt. They therefore, similar to the unveiling characteristic of the mid-twentieth century, performatively created culture, even as they were singled out as its indicator and representative.

Women, Voicing

The segregation of women's voices along the religious-secular divide continued in publicly produced and distributed cassettes, bringing with it the implications for women's voices present during the gramophone and, especially, radio eras. Women's voices continued to be considered inappropriate for religious material, though they were prominent in singing and popular media, including the sha'bi genre.[106] Thus to limit one's voice as a Muslim woman was to claim the authority of religion in order to uphold what were viewed as traditional Islamic gender roles.

Ironically, cassette culture in fact enabled greater participation of women in many spheres of interaction where their presence had been discouraged or denied while it also upheld gender roles in line with the New Islam. As both Hirschkind and Mahmood note,

[106] Hirschkind, 123-124; Kubala; Nelson on Qur'an recitation; Frishkopf, "Introduction," 19-35. The sha'bi genre was by no means the only genre of music available on cassette, or necessarily the one most listened to, and was in fact associated with a particular group of people: the urban working class. I highlight it here not because it is representative of all music available on cassette, but rather because of the discursive role it played as the subject of criticism from multiple angles, its class association, and its, perhaps disproportionate, prominence "on the street" and in discourses surrounding music.

even if choosing not to produce cassettes, women were active listeners and consumers of new media. Many performance and discussion spaces had been predominantly occupied by men, but the cassette allowed women to listen to cassette sermons that ran counter to the official narrative, learn the Qur'an from recordings of professional Qur'an reciters, listen to various types of music, and, importantly, engage in conversation with one another and with the men in their families about them.[107] The producers of these media were also aware of their new audience and reacted accordingly in both secular media, as discussed by Frishkopf, and religious media, as suggested by the shift in sermon topics to address issues taken to be of particular importance to women observed by Hirschkind.[108]

The more flexible terms of engagement with sound culture that accompanied the introduction of the cassette, however, presented new challenges. Cassettes came with a move toward wider user control. Listeners were able to chose when, what, how, with whom, and for what reasons to play a cassette. This meant, on the one hand, that there were expansive "grass-roots" playback options that became a mode of social communication and allowed for, as Hirschkind argues, the formation of publics and counterpublics.[109] On the other, it meant that recordings could be used in unanticipated ways for unforeseen reasons, which gave rise to a general anxiety about how cassettes

[107] Mahmood; Hirschkind 123-124; Labib as-Said, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version*, trans. Bernard Weiss, M. A. Rauf, and Morroe Berger (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1975).

[108] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 33-35; Hirschkind, 123, 181. While cassettes also opened up new possibilities for "grass roots" recordings as well as production for a narrow target audience, I was unable to find evidence of women making their own recordings for other women. This does not mean it did not or is not happening, especially in light of media production by women observed by Baron, but it is likely not a widespread practice. While there may be several contributing factors for this seeming absence, it can be reasonably linked to the general worry over the infinite possibilities of private use and reproduction of cassettes.

[109] Frishkopf, "Mediated," 83, 97; Hirschkind.

might used in ways other than their author had intended or appropriate to the material.[110] This environment in which the role of the individual listener, player, and agent was rising in the realm of media practices, in contrast to the state control characteristic of the first half of the twentieth century, gave rise to at least two trends of particular importance for women: first, the need for individual ethical work in order to realize one's religious goals at a time when monopolies over information, production, consumption, and lifestyle were being deconstructed and challenged, and second, a continued emphasis on the voicer rather than the listener, begun already with the introduction of the gramophone and amplified with the cassette.

Technology as Social Communication, the Voice, and Class

As the state and its various arms of control, from its monopolization of the media industry to its economic socialism under Nasser, were loosened under Sadat and then even more so during the 1980s and 1990s, the individual was responsible for controlling their own media consumption and production.[111]Doing so, moreover, became a form of social communication. In other words, to navigate the media terrain was to act politically and in a socially legible way. With the broad societal movement toward the New Islam this, for many, meant that one's media choices both were, to recall Foucault, a form of ethical work as well as an instance of social agency through a socially legible identification with Islam. In the same way that the hijab was both part of religious practice as well as a social symbol

[110] For example, Hirschkind, 65, where inappropriate emotional response was feared on the behalf of women. See also Frishkopf, "Introduction," in which he discusses the issues of private use in relationship to television followed by the video clip into the home. This concern is not limited to cassettes, however, and can be found in debates about the mobile phone, such as whether it is permissible to bring your phone into the bathroom if one has a Qur'an app downloaded on it, a question that abounds on fatwa forums.

[111] Frishkopf, "Mediated," 83, 97.

that conferred the authority of adherence to predominant ideas of Islamic gender roles, so were one's media practices a form of religious habitus that was also socially and politically legible.[112] For example, to listen to sha'bi music was to actively identify oneself with the urban lower-class as well as Euro-American influence and in opposition to the New Islam.[113]Or, as Michael Frishkopf argues, one's selection of a recording of an Egyptian versus Saudi Arabian style of Qur'an recitation was an ideological decision and identification.[114]

This was particularly important for women as women continued to be the representatives of culture, and their lack of adherence to New Islamic gender ideals in a media product was often cited as evidence of cultural, moral, and artistic decline.[115]While the sha'bi genre continued to grow, for example, "with the gradual victory of capitalist logic over traditional values,"[116] women were able to demonstrate their adherence to New Islamic gender roles by being discriminating of their use of voice, in turn actively shaping a society in which those gender roles were dominant and legible through audio choices. In contrast to the state-enforced religious-secular divide in sound of the Nasser era, this boundary was, under the open door policy and with the proliferation of cassettes, maintained through individuals' choices as modes of socially engaged ethical work. As women were looked to as both indicators and representatives of culture, their choices

[112] See note 16 and Mahmood on habitus.

[113] Kubala, 181.

[114] Frishkopf, "Mediated."

[115] Ahmed; Baron; Kubala; Frishkopf, "Introduction," 30-31; Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri, "Ruby and the Checkered Heart," in *Music and Media in the Arab World*, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo; New York: The American University Press, 2011).

[116] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 30.

carried significant social and political weight within Egypt as well as abroad. It was their decisions regarding how they used their voices, rather than a listener's intention or attitude, that were politically important and, as reflected in this paper's opening quotation by Salih bin Fawzan al-Fawzan, bore the responsibility for public morality. This mode of ethical work was not limited to the sphere of mediate sound, however, as evidenced by the concern of whether a woman's voice is 'awra in personal interactions as well, but rather became a type of ethical work that was socially communicative in personal as well as mediated interactions.

Importantly, women's voices were also a class issue. The adherence to New Islamic gender ideals was associated wealth and the middle and upper classes, which meant that adherence to those ideals also linked one with those classes. Meanwhile, cassettes undermined any class distinctions that might have been made in terms of access to mediated music, as was the case with the gramophone and early radio, leaving voicing decisions to make such distinctions. At the same time, however, a woman's decision to be selective about how she used her voice was possible only for upper class women who did not depend on their voice for income. While the hijab allowed for upward mobility by enabling one to work and learn in mixed-gender spaces, the voice still needed to be used and thus potentially undermined the New Islamic ideal.[117] A woman's decision to be selective about how, when, and in what ways she used her voice, while also part of her

[117] It is interesting to note these issues surface in present-day online fatwa forums where, in one responding to the permissibility of a woman studying in a mixed-gender school to speak in class, the response was no, even if it negatively impacted her performance. In another response regarding the permissibility for a woman to use her voice in a mixed-gender environment to purchase a good from a store, the response says that it is, if it is necessary and limited only to the speech needed for one's purpose, but also that there is a risk of it including "laughter or chitchat or an alluring tone." Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, supervisor, "She Has No Choice but to Study in a Mixed Environment– Can She Comment and Debate in front of Males?" Islam Question and Answer, https://islamqa.info/en/72448; al-Munajjid, "Women's Voices."

religious practice, was also a realization of the New Islamic ideal: a wealthy, upper class, Muslim woman who strictly adhered to New Islamic gender roles. The realization of this ideal further operated as an ongoing critique both the "vulgar" Egyptian lower class as well as Euro-American political, cultural, and religious ideals.

Television, Satellite TV, and the "Fīdīyu Klīb" Era

The relationship of the voice to the visual body has grown increasingly complex over the last several decades with the introduction of television, satellite television, and the internet, media in which audio and visual are mixed but where the visual has become discursively dominant, both within the media itself and in conversations surrounding them. While a careful parallel analysis of the voice and body in these media is much needed and would be a fruitful area of inquiry, for the purposes of this paper, it is significant to note the reified dominance of the language of the visual– even while sound has continued to be politically, culturally, and religiously active– and its implications for the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra.

Following the lifting of state censorship with the introduction of satellite television in the 1990s, Egyptian media witnessed an explosion of "video music," or music that had come to be experienced primarily visually.[118]From the introduction of satellite television to the use of mobile phones up to the present internet era, "video music" has continued to dominate. This video music, moreover, features, and indeed relies on, the portrayal of hypersexualized women, whose sexuality is the dominant feature of the *fīdīyu klīb*, video clip, and is economically lucrative.[119] The rise of video music has been and continues to be

[118] Frishkopf, "Introduction," 20-21.

[119] Ibid., 27-31; Abdel Aziz, "Arab music Videos and Their Implications for Arab Music and Media," in *Music*

critiqued from multiple angles, including notable critique from a religious perspective. This disapproval has largely been voiced in terms of the visual as it was reified as the language of sexuality in video music.[120]

The rise of the video clip was accompanied by a decrease in popularity of non-visual audio media, such as the cassette. Cassettes, however, still continue to be used for religious media, in which women are not featured, among pious Muslims and cab and bus drivers.[121] As Hirschkind with his analysis of cassette sermons, Frishkopf with his focus on Qur'an recitation styles, and the presence and development of the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra discussed here have shown, sound continues to impact and shape social, political, and religious realities.[122] At the same time, however, the city streets are flooded by video clips publicly displayed in cafes and shops. These video clips not only internally prioritize the visual over the sonic but have also been criticized and discussed in terms of the visual. Meanwhile, non-visual audio media has come to be associated with the religious and the upholding of a stricter interpretation of New Islamic gender ideals. While it is not the case that the visual neatly "maps onto" to the non-religious while the sonic "maps onto" the religious, as the discussions surrounding the hijab at the very least have shown, those activities that do not uphold the strictest interpretation of the New Islamic ideal woman are

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and Media in the Arab World, ed. Michael Frishkopf (Cairo; New York: The American University Press, 2011); Elmessiri; Kubala.

[120] This focus on the visual in media is not limited to music and is replicated across genres. For example, Frishkopf notes that it is also present in discussion of news channels. Frishkopf, "Introduction," 31.

[121] Ibid., 19; Hirschkind; This is likely also replicated in cassettes and internet-based mp3 and mp4 audio files, though I have not been able to find any information on these forms of religious media. Most of the attention to these media has been centered on music.

[122] Hirschkind; Frishkopf, "Mediated."

primarily discussed in terms of the visual while the audio-only media are associated with the religious. The association of the sonic with the religious and also the absence of women in the medium in contrast to the rational and visual in which women are marketed and understood in terms of their sexuality was thus reified.

While the discussion above is more of an exploration than a cohesive argument, it does at the very least indicate an impetus to "see" women's voices that are not being used in ways that uphold New Islamic gender ideals in terms of the visual, uncovered, and sexualized body. Thus, to ask whether a woman's voice is 'awra is to ask whether a woman's voice falls into this visual audio realm of a woman's uncovered sexualized body, reinforcing the connection between a woman's voice and her visual body first seen in the 1930s. At the same time, however, it is a question that conjoins the visual and the sonic and might also be seen as challenging these categorical arrangements by explicitly linking them and making them the joint objects of thought and debate.

As women continued to be indicators and representatives of culture and morality, the renewed interest in Islam as a solution to social and economic problems with New Islam beginning in the 1970s meant that more women were opting to uphold the New Islamic gender ideals, which largely continued to be structured by the colonial and then nationalist religious-secular divide, including it expression in media. Meanwhile, women were increasingly responsible for upholding gender roles through their media practices at a time when there was general anxiety about private use of media. Their choices, moreover, were to be viewed on both a local Egyptian and international stage. Out of this complex, the last key aspect of the question, "Is a woman's voice 'awra?" emerges: While the connection

between a woman's visual body and her voice as well as the need to voice the question in terms of vision arose during the colonial and nationalist periods (reinforced with satellite television and internet beginning in the 1990s), this last era of the cassette, television, and internet cultivated the need for individual women to ask in order to navigate the new political, cultural, and religious terrain; the anxious concern of how privatized media might be used; and the importance of pursuing an economic and class ideal that is also restrictive.

"Are Women's Voices 'Awra?": Preliminary Conclusions and Future Research

As Judy Wajcman points out in her study of technology and capitalism, technology is never neutral and is instead invested and tailored for the predispositions and assumptions and prejudices of those that made and use it.[123] The shifts in conceptions of voice and body that occurred throughout the twentieth century in Egypt came as a result of the meeting of multiple regime changes from the colonial to the national and the introduction of new audio technologies, giving rise to a highly charged political, religious, and cultural audio terrain.

New audio technologies were introduced and used first during the British occupation of Egypt in a cultural context in which women and their bodies were ushered into the cultural spotlight and implicated in a the simultaneous division and interdependence between the religious and the secular. Through a combination of performance, media, education, and economic control, exemplified by the founding of the Royal Music Institute and the Cairo Congress of Arab Music, this initial divide under colonialism was replicated in sound and integrated into Egyptian sound practices. The introduction of the radio was the first to introduce the association between women's voices and their visual and sexualized bodies, as women navigated the secular-religious through modes of covering and uncovering; however, it was not until the New Islam became the dominant social ideal and women became increasingly responsible for their own sonic

[123] Judy Wajcman, *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

representational practices as social communication with the proliferation of individualized audio technologies and the open door economic policy under Sadat that the concern and urgency fueling the question of whether a woman's voice was 'awra arose. This marked a shift from a top-down mode of media control to a more grass-roots concern for use of the mediated and non-mediated voice.

This question, while posed by individual women concerned about their own religious practice, operates in a broader field of multiple critique. By upholding the gender ideals of the New Islam, it critiques Euro-American influence and cultural models while also competing with Saudi Arabia. By bringing voice and sound to the forefront of social and religious concern, it may also be read as a challenge to the hegemony of the removed, rational eye, even as it uses the language of vision to bridge the gap. At the same time, it is also a social and class critique of the current media environment, the working class, and women's positions within them in Egypt. It allows women to distance themselves from and object to the sexualization of their bodies as well as critique the tastes and practices of the working class.

Though the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra is widely represented and discussed in fatwa forums as well as in popular online media, the strictest interpretation and answer that women should not speak to non-mahram men likely remains a practice of a minority in Egypt, if for no other reason than the practical need for many women to use their voices on a regular basis with non-mahram men to navigate their daily lives. Beyond the practical, however, the popularity of sha'bi music and video clips among both men and

women also suggests that, while such strict control of one's voice may be an ideal for women, it at least faces competition in the form of the video clip.[124]

Though the above speculations arise out of the observations discussed in this paper, they point to the many questions surrounding contemporary Egyptian women's use of their voices and the need for further and more robust research. In particular, for the contemporary era, an ethnographic study of how women are using their voices, their media practices, and the interplay of the visual and the sonic in both mediated and non-mediated encounters would offer immense insight into how the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra is played out in a social context. Relatedly, a thorough analysis of the online fatwa forums in which these questions are posted would also aide in understanding who is asking and answering the questions; the number of views and level of interest in them; potential government sponsorship; their citations of Qur'an, hadith, and tafsir; and, paired with an ethnographic study like the one suggested above, how women are using the internet to navigate this question.

There is also substantial room for further historical research and analysis. To begin, a study of primary source literature, such as the early educational materials produced by the Royal Oriental Music Institute and the government or popular publications about music and theater, for their portrayal and organization of sound would provide more direct insight into the shifts in attitudes toward sound and the differences between the official view and popular views. This would be well supplemented by a joint historical analysis of sound and vision, tracing their interconnectedness in the premediated era to the possibility of their separation enabled by mediation through to their reunion in mediation when their

[124] See Frishkopf, "Introduction," 31-35 on the popularity of video clips and sha'bi music among men and women in relation to eroticism of them.

separation through mediation is still possible. Finally, a more careful look at women's voices through, for example, Qur'an recitation or musical careers, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would aide in understanding the sonic culture into which colonialism and audio technologies were introduced. A useful tool in such a study would be an analysis of Qur'anic tafsirs to track when the interpretations mentioned in the first section of this paper began to surface.

Though there remain numerous avenues open for scholarly exploration, it has been my aim in this paper to highlight women's voices a historically and contemporarily significant field of investigation and to offer insight into the ways the colonial encounter and the introduction of audio technologies gave rise to the question of whether a woman's voice is 'awra. Much less a conclusion than a beginning, this paper demonstrates both the need for ongoing conversation as well as its political, social, and religious weight, whether in considering gender in contemporary Egypt or woman mosque and prayer leadership in America.

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